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FROM PARIS TO FOREIGN OFFICE

Cuba 3 13

Cypher/OTP

P R I S E C

Sir G. Jebb

No.331

D:6.55 p.m. November 11, 1959

November 11, 1959

R:6.15 p.m. November 11, 1959

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Addressed to Washington telegram No.66 of November 11
Repeated for information to: Foreign Office

Following from Secretary of State.

Please pass the following personal message to Mr. Herter from me.

Begins.

Dear Chris,

Thank you for your message of November 5 about the Cuban request to exchange Sea Furies for Hunters. I am most grateful for the thought which you have given to this awkward issue and its difficulties. Your frank exposition of the problem as seen from your end has been most helpful. I can assure you that we fully understand the feelings in the United States after Castro's gratuitous attacks and that we have every sympathy with you in your present exasperation with the Cuban Government. The last thing we want to do is to make things difficult for you or to give Castro any encouragement to continue his present hostility to the United States. I would like, if I may, to set out my own reactions to your message again with frankness.

2. Your people and ours have exchanged views about the stability of Castro's régime. We in London are inclined to wonder whether Castro's downfall is really only a question of time. Unlike Argentina under Peron, where the coherence and spirit of the armed forces was never destroyed, the Cuban armed forces seem unlikely to act as the ultimate guardian of the nation's interest. Moreover, Cuba is not a poor country and now appears to be becoming rapidly less dependent on imports, especially of food. The country may, of course, just drift into a major economic crisis but any process of disintegration may take a very long time. I must confess that

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I feel very uneasy at the prospect of doing nothing and merely waiting for Castro to fall. We tried this before with Nasser with a marked lack of success. In the meantime, if we in the Western world continue to give the impression that we are implacably opposed to the present régime in Cuba and that we will do nothing to help the Cubans so long as Castro is there, we may drive them more and more into the arms of the Communists politically as well as economically. There may be a real risk of the Communists gaining a stranglehold over the country and of the eventual collapse of the Castro régime leading to an even worse state of affairs. We might find ourselves confronted with another Guatemalan situation in a far less favourable climate of opinion.

3. We ought, therefore, to consider, distasteful though it may be, whether it would not serve our own long term interests better to adopt a somewhat more forthcoming attitude towards Castro's Government. One way in which we could, for our part, take a step in this direction, and perhaps do something to put ourselves in a position to exercise some influence over the Cuban Government, would be not to intervene to prevent the proposed exchange of aircraft. The Cuban Government seem to attach enormous importance to this transaction and, from what we have been told by the Cuban Ambassador here and by Cuban Ministers in Havana, there seems little doubt that they regard this question as the touchstone of the British attitude towards Cuba. There must, I think, be a real risk that if we block their supply, Castro will get his aircraft from behind the Iron Curtain where, as you probably know, he is already making enquiries. This, of itself, certainly would not be the end of the world; what I fear more is that the Cubans will become convinced that there is no hope for them in the West. If, however, we allow the deal to go ahead we shall do much to encourage the Cubans to look to the West rather than to the East for help and assistance and may thus materially increase the chances of a lowering of the present tension in the Caribbean. This seems to me a valid consideration, whatever the nature of the Cuban Government of the day. Moreover, in the last resort delivery of the aircraft could always be held up later on.

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4. I realise that for us to allow the exchange to proceed would, unless we can effectively present it as a special case, be a strain on the present embargo. In view, however, of the politically beneficial results which might be expected I think it could well be argued that it should be treated as such.

5. My colleagues and I must make a decision shortly about this, but I hope that what I have said will help you to present our decision, if it is not to prevent the exchange, as favourably as possible. I would only add that it is not a question of our authorizing this transaction, but of whether we decide to intervene to prevent it. There is a difference, not sufficiently understood here and perhaps elsewhere.

With warm regards

Yours ever

Selwyn.

Ends.

Foreign Office please pass to Washington.

[Repeated as requested]

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